

THE TENNESSEAN

Contest prompts students to conjure up businesses Professionals hear host of pitches from honors economics classmates

BY MITCHELL KLINE • THE TENNESSEAN • NOVEMBER 23, 2009

Among the top business ideas pitched by students at Centennial High School was a phone application that places a call to get someone out of an awkward situation and a service that would allow students to buy notes from the smartest kids in class.

But the winning pitch, according to a panel of judges, was a business that combines social networking Web sites with online retailers to create "wish lists" for upcoming birthdays or other present giving events. The idea came from seniors Aleena Bowman, Emily Benavides and Estela Anderson.

Entrepreneur Day was Wednesday at Centennial, where about 120 honors economics students had hours to come up with an idea for a business and present it to community and business leaders. Among those doing the judging were County Mayor Rogers Anderson, Franklin Mayor John Schroer, a marketing analyst from Mars Petcare, presidents of three local chambers of commerce and entrepreneur Mark Cleveland of Brentwood.

"It is the kind of hands-on problem-solving activity that a 21st century classroom should look like," said Don Kirby, who teaches economics at Centennial. "I also like it because it allows for a true cooperative learning experience as students learn to come to consensus agreements."

The event was organized by Belmont University's Center for Entrepreneurship and the Williamson County Office of Economic Development.

"It's important to teach kids at an early age that there is nothing stopping them from developing the next great product of service, no matter where they live or what their background is," said Matt Largen, director of the Office of Economic Development.

"Our office looks forward to supporting this and many other initiatives surrounding entrepreneurship in Williamson County. After all, 21 percent of the workforce in Williamson County is classified as entrepreneurs, a higher percentage than Austin, Texas."



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Laura Tunncliffe, left, owner of Now Leasing, which offers furnished corporate housing, listens to a business idea proposed by seniors Trevor Hyssong, Ryan Carrigan, John Rainey and Drew Layne. Economics students at Centennial High School pitched ideas to local experts in a competition at the school Wednesday. (Jeanne Reasonover / The Tennessean)